

# St. Mary Magdalene Geddington



## **A PRIESTLY MYSTERY**

Solving a 14<sup>th</sup> Century Puzzle

# Our Church Building

**The Nave:** The present Nave dates from c970AD (possibly earlier). Triangle-headed arcading can still be seen in the North Aisle on what was originally an exterior wall, as can a splayed window pierced in this wall. Roof scars on the Nave's east wall indicate ancient roof lines. The clerestory windows are later Perpendicular style additions.

**The North Aisle:** The north wall of the Nave was pierced for an arcade of 2½ bays when the North Aisle was added in the late 12th century. A timber door in the north wall of the North Aisle, known as the 'King's Door' once led to/from the former Royal palace (the steps were removed in 1855). The North Chapel was re-built in 1855-7 and the present vestry added to its eastern end.

**The South Aisle** was added in the 13th century, with Perpendicular arches forming 3 complete bays. One small piece of Saxon arcading remains. A Tudor porch was added in the late 16th century, but this was demolished and replaced by the present porch in 1856-57. The blocked-up doorway to the room above can still be seen to the right of the south door.

**The Chancel:** there is evidence in roof scars and in the 5 splayed lower clerestory windows of earlier structures. Stylistically, the present Chancel dates from circa 1300-20. However, a Latin inscription dates it to 1369, eleven years after the church (previously in Royal patronage) was granted to the monks of Pipewell Abbey, who "... shall in the first place construct and build the Chancel of the same Church and the windows of the same competently..." The upper clerestory windows are later additions. The screen dates from 1908, and the choir stalls from 1912.

**The South (Lady) Chapel:** Of 13<sup>th</sup> Century construction with complex alterations this chapel is linked to the Chancel by two bays, the western one of which holds a 14<sup>th</sup> Century screen that originally filled the Chancel arch. The eastern arch holds a replica screen (1907). The chapel is separated from the South Aisle by a screen given by Maurice Tresham and dating from 1618. This stood in the Chancel arch until 1855, when that arch was raised. A 14<sup>th</sup> Century effigy of a priest lies near the Altar – quite possibly the William Glover named in the Chancel's 1369 inscription.

**The Tower** dates from c1380 (possibly springing from a 12th Century tower). The clock mechanism (1766) is by Bailey of Stanton. Of the 6 bells, the two oldest were cast in 1550 and 1580. The heaviest weighs 11 ¾ cwt and was given in 1630 by Sir Robert Dallington. The newest was cast at Whitechapel in 2004, when a new bell frame was also installed.

# Our Priestly Effigy

Lying west to east in the South (Lady) Chapel is a monument commemorating a medieval priest. He is tonsured with a long neck, a chalice in his right hand, a bible or Missal in his left, and a paten (for the bread) under his right arm.

## Vested for Mass



He is vested for Mass, with a chasuble over his alb (not a shield, as some have suggested). To the left of his head is a worn-down cherub. The stone shows signs of having been trimmed in the past, and a piece appears to have been lost from the eastern end. The effigy has generally been dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, but some sources think it may be from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Tonsured Priests*

## Some Questions, Some Clues

Who was this unknown priest commemorated by this mysterious effigy?

Was he one of two men named in a curious Latin inscription dated 1369 in our Chancel?

Why has a tradition that he died celebrating Mass persisted for centuries?

Why are his face and the nearby angel so worn down, whilst his lower half is well-preserved?

People have long puzzled over his identity, but there are several intriguing clues as to who he may have been and why he was commemorated in this way.....

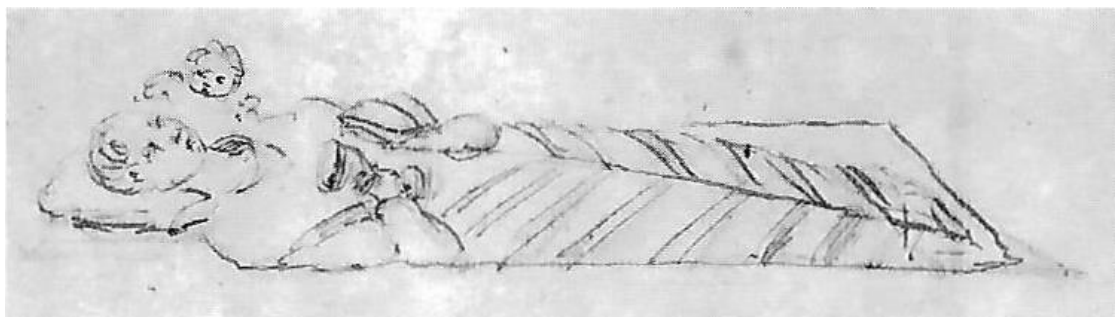


*A modern chasuble  
(design A. Pugin)*

# Some Clues

## Past Images

The artist **Peter Tillemans** drew the effigy in 1719 showing a well-defined face, upper body and angel. A note on the back of this drawing (though not in Tillemans' hand) says it lay in the "*N Isle at Ye upper end under the N Wall*".



Drawing by Peter Tillemans (1719)  
©British Library Board. .Ms.32467, ff.104-106.  
*Ackn.:* Northamptonshire Record Society

Over 100 years later, in 1843, **Sir Henry Dryden** also recorded this monument. By this time, the lowermost part of the effigy seems to have been lost, and the facial features and cherub appear less distinct.

By 1899, a drawing by **Christopher Markham** shows it much as we see today, with the eyes just discernible.

The rough saw-marks on the southern side of the stone indicate it was probably attached to a wall, suggesting it is not in its original position. Experts have suggested the wearing-down is likely to have been water damage, which is feasible as it is known that the church was in a poor state by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, when major renovations were carried out.



Drawing by Sir Henry Dryden (1843)

© Northamptonshire Central Library: DR/25/120/001

## Past Writings

The antiquarian **John Bridges**, who gathered his material at about the same time as Tillemans, said: *“Adjacent to [the inscription described below] is the portrait in stone of a person, with a chalice in his right hand; supposed by the tradition of the place to have been a priest who died as he was administering the sacrament. But the cup is added only to shew that he was in priest’s orders. And had therefore the power of administering the eucharist.”*

A letter dated c1736 in the Buccleuch Archive says that a *“stone may be seen in the Chancel of Geddington Church with a figure of a man with a cup in his hand and round the stone Hujus ecclesiae capellanus.”* [Chaplain of this Church]. No trace of that inscription can be seen today. This letter also says that local people believed the priest died during Mass, and later sources again report this belief.

## A Curious Date

One of the curiosities of our Church is a Latin inscription in Lombardic script dated 1369 that runs around the foot of the Sanctuary wall and into the adjacent Lady Chapel.

This inscription is curious because, stylistically, most experts date the Chancel and South Chapel to no later than 1300 to 1320, so the inscribed date of 1369 at first sight is difficult to explain. Might it be linked to our priestly effigy?....



Part of the inscription showing the date: MCCCLXIX

# A Conundrum in Stone

The inscription around the Sanctuary reads:

+ WILLELMVS · GLOVERE · DE · GEVTYNGTON ·  
CAPELLANVS · FECIT · SCABELLA · EIVS · ARE · ET ·  
PAVIMENTARE · ISTVM · CANCELLVM ; AD · HONOREM  
DEI · ET · BEATE · MARIE · Q<sub>VI</sub> · OB IIT - IN · FESTO ·  
CORPORIS · CHRISTI · ANNO · DOMINI · M.CCC.LXIX ·  
CVIVS · ANIME · PROPICIETVR · DEVS · AMEN

*[William Glover Chaplain of Geddington made these raised seats and paved this Chancel to the glory of God and the Blessed Mary, who died at the Feast of Corpus Christi in the year of Our Lord 1369 on whose soul may God have mercy. Amen]*

The text in the Lady Chapel reads:

+ ROBERTVS · LAVNCELVN · DE · GEYTINGTOVN · FECIT ·  
ISTVM · CANCELLVM · CVIVS · ANIME · PROPICIETVR ·  
DEVS · AMEN

*[Robert Launcelyn of Geddington built this Chancel on whose soul may God have mercy. Amen]*

## Not Where They Were

The stones are not in their original position, however. The historian Bridges, who gathered his material in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, says: “*On the steps leading to the altar, many of the stones being transposed and some lost, is this imperfect inscription:*

+ WILLELMVS GLOVERE DE GEVTYNTON CAPELLANVS  
FECIT SCAB...RELLA...PORIS XPESTI ANNO DOMINI  
MDCCCLXIX CVIVS ANIME PROPIC... QVI OB IIT - IN ·  
FE... A..ME

*[Note: Bridges gives MDCCCLXIX, or 1869! This is clearly wrong]*

and “*Upon a step at the upper end of the south chancel:*

+ ROBERTVS · LAVNCELVN FECIT CAPELLANVS...  
GEVTYNTON..”

We know that the inscription was moved to its present position during major renovations carried out by George Gilbert Scott in 1855-57. It is clear that, in doing so, “*some ingenuity appears to have been exercised in deciphering the inscription on the altar steps*” [Northampton Mercury; 7 November 1857] resulting in some significant reconstructions and interpolations being made. The Rev. Church, writing to The Duke of Buccleuch in that year, said that the text was reconstructed by a member of the Camden Society who was father to a pupil at his (Rev. Church’s) private school in Geddington. *[source: Buccleuch Archive].*

# Light from the Archives

## Endowment to the Monks of Pipewell

In 1358, the Bishop of Lincoln:

*“...appropriated annexed united and granted the Parish Church of Geytingdon ..... to the religious men the abbot and Convent of the monastery of Pippewell...”* and ordained that *“... the aforesaid religious men shall in the first place construct and build the Chancel of the same Church and the windows of the same competently...”*

source: *Buccluch Archive - transcript & translation of an original document in Lincoln Cathedral Archive with thanks to Crispin Powell, Archivist to the Duke of Buccleuch.*

## The Manor Court Rolls

These records are extensive for the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century and here we find that Robert Launcelyn became a beadle in 1378. He is often recorded as a pledge-provider; as well as brewer, the holder of several selions (ridges) in the common fields and an (often unscrupulous) miller too. Clearly prosperous, it is certainly credible that he paid to extend the Chancel to its present extent in the 1360s.

William Glover's name appears only once in these same Court Rolls. In 1378 Alice Comfort, the 'relative and heir' of 'William Glover, chaplain', came to the Court and asked it to grant her and a husband a half-share of a 'messuage' [a plot of land with its buildings] in which William once had an interest. The date and the identity with a deceased chaplain therefore make this very likely to be the William Glover of the 1369 church inscription.

*Source: Geddington (Crown) Manorial Court Rolls 1377-1414  
Northamptonshire Record Office [NRA 23059 Montagu-Douglas-Scott].  
With thanks to Edward Coulson for his transcription/translation.*

## A Mystery Solved?

Putting all the pieces of evidence together, it appears entirely credible to propose that:

- 1) the 1369 inscription records the faithful completion by the Pipewell monks of the Bishop's 1358 commission (probably an enlargement of the Chancel rather than a complete new build);
- 2) Robert Launcelyn paid for the work or perhaps was the builder;
- 3) William Glover oversaw the works at the east end of the Chancel;
- 4) William died at the *Feast of Corpus Christi*. Literally the 'body of Christ', we can therefore make sense of the tradition that he died whilst celebrating Mass, for the Festival *itself* is a celebration of the Eucharist.



## Who We Are

St Mary Magdalene, Geddington is part of the Church of England in the Diocese of Peterborough.



We worship God in in both modern and ancient Anglican tradition; and every week offer a wide range of services and social events for all ages and preferences, We extend a special welcome to all who are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, rich or poor; and children of all ages are always welcome.

Our main Sunday services are at 9.45am; there is a vibrant Sunday School, and midweek services are usually at 10am on Tuesdays and Fridays. There are also plenty of events and activities throughout the year. Visitors are welcome, and guided tours of the church can be arranged via the contacts below.

## Further Reading

*The History and Antiquities of Geddington* by C.A. Markham (1899)

*Estate Letters from the Time of John, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Montagu*, transcribed by Alan Toseland, pub. Northamptonshire Record Society (2013).

*Northamptonshire in the Early Eighteenth Century: The Drawings of Peter Tillemans and Others*, pub. Northamptonshire Record Society (1996).

## Contact Us

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*Cover: 14<sup>th</sup> Century Effigy of a Priest, Geddington Church*



St. Mary Magdalene  
Geddington

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